

## Teaching Gem – Working with and understanding Professional Leadership Communities (PLCs)

During my time at Mattson Middle School, I was included in the social studies professional leadership community. At Mattson they used these as a way for the teachers to concentrate on their subject matter and plan units together. I had a hard time gaining buy in in these situations. It seemed like most of the teachers were stuck in their ways and had little interest in these meetings other than to inform others on what they were doing. Some sharing was done, but the rhetoric was dominated with phrases like “well this is what I’m going to do”.

To continue to think about how to integrate into PLCs, I thought about the lecture Dr. Vong Ratts gave to us back in September. He named five factors that are the keys in gaining buy in. First, focus on relative advantage and answer the question what are the advantages of adapting this perspective. Second, show how it is compatible with the existing system. Third, explain your ideas in a way that are not overly complex. Fourth, show what opportunities there are to integrate your perspective into projects. Finally, show what observable outcomes that will come from integrating your ideas into practice.

I also looked at a few articles from journals. Linder, Post and Calabrese concluded that two of the most important elements of successful PLCs were a sense of autonomy and the sharing of results. The first point is that they believed PLCs were more successful if they were grouped by interest and topic rather than grouped by grade level. I agree with this assessment, as I believe my middle school PLC would have been more successful if we were connected by something more than grade level. Also, we would have had a topic to approach (like how we were not reaching an underserved group) that would hold us together. The group already had the ability to do what they want, but allowing them the power to pursue a topic of interest would have been excellent. I also agree with sharing and debriefing results of what happened. This was a powerful time when buy in could be gained. Most people are not convinced by just words. Powerful results can cause people to believe in what you are trying to tell them.

Professional learning communities are a powerful way for teachers to meet the problems of a school. Sigurðardóttir is an Icelandic researcher who did a study on their effectiveness and found that they increased student performance. I believe after my research that the best way for PLCs to be organized is by a topic of interest for those involved. Once you group these professionals and allow them to approach and implement change in the areas that they feel fit, change will begin to happen in the school. These changes should be shown to the other teachers, because results speak. Once the teachers see the positive change, they will have to buy in to new ideas.

Sources: Linder, R. A., Post, G., & Calabrese, K. (2012). Professional Learning Communities: Practices for Successful Implementation. *Delta Kappa Gamma Bulletin*, 78(3), 13-22.  
Sigurðardóttir, A. (2010). Professional Learning Community in Relation to School Effectiveness. *Scandinavian Journal Of Educational Research*, 54(5), 395-412. doi:10.1080/00313831.2010.508904